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DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

NGO Priorities for the Eighties

Jeanne Vickers
UNICEF Geneva

Third - and last - chance?

It is probably true to say that, if the third UN Development Decade is to be any more successful than the first two, there has to be a mobilization of the political will of governments to change the present imbalance in the distribution, consumption and control of the world's resources, including food, energy, water and health resources; and that the major emphasis of such mobilization must be in the so-called "industrialized" countries.

The present state of the North-South Dialogue shows how far there is to go. And while the Brandt Commission, the Club of Rome, and of course the United Nations, among others, are making Herculean efforts to transform confrontation into genuine negotiation, the success of their efforts will depend very largely upon the amount of public support which exists - and is seen to exist - for their policies.

Public support requires first of all a greater understanding of the issues involved, leading to community action and "lobbying" at local, regional and national levels. And for this, there is no more

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Jeanne Vickers is Development Education Officer at the UNICEF Office in Geneva.

Information
Division
UNICEF
United Nations
New York
Tel: 754-1234
Cables:
UNICEF-New York
Telex: 127895

Service de
l'Information
UNICEF
Palais des Nations
1211 Genève
Tél: (022) 34 60 11
Télégrammes:
UNICEF-Genève
Télex: 27 908

effective agent than the non-governmental organisation. NGO members, by their very nature, are committed individuals who care about the issues dealt with by the NGO concerned, and are thus a force to be reckoned with.

That this is so was shown very dramatically during the International Year of the Child, considered one of the most successful in the history of the United Nations, and this thanks mainly to the astonishing efforts and accomplishments of NGOs throughout the world in support of the Year.

According to the NGO/IYC Committee, many NGOs seem to have "discovered" UNICEF during the International Year of the Child through its development education activities and materials, while others intensified their own efforts in this field in partnership with UNICEF. Many NGOs also discovered that over the years UNICEF had transformed itself from an emergency relief operation into a major human development agency, still voluntarily funded - that is, having no part of the UN's regular budget - but playing a pivotal role with regard to community development and the improvement of conditions for women and children in the Third World.

Communication is a two-way process

Most of us would probably agree that, in spite of the changes brought about by communications technology, real communication between the peoples of the world has never been so obviously flawed and inadequate. Efforts to change the one-way flow from north to south into a two-way exchange are having a hard time getting off the ground.

Today we are still struggling to overcome the effects of our colonial heritage, a struggle made infinitely more difficult because of the attitudes which became an integral part of our education systems, passed on from generation to generation, perpetuating racial and religious intolerance, standing in the way of all attempts to create a just and peaceful world for all.

Millions continue to die unnecessarily every year for lack of food, shelter and medical care. And we now see even the feeble efforts which have so far been made to distribute the world's resources more equitably through "aid" programmes being eroded by the world economic crisis, as the "industrialised" societies retreat into protectionism and slam the door on the products of the "developing" world, seemingly oblivious of the fact that in so doing they slam the exit door for their own products. The revolving door aspect of international trade has still to be recognised and appreciated.

Interdependence is, indeed, a word often heard but still little understood. The "North" pulls its national blankets around it, while its powerful institutions continue to try to dictate the terms of world trade and see no reason why this should not suit everybody. Yet the world economic crisis is still with us, and not too much thought seems to be given to those millions of unnecessary deaths.

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The fact is that some 30 per cent of all children born in the developing countries die before the age of 5 from malnutrition and related diseases. Up to half of those who survive suffer malnutrition severe enough to leave them with irreversibly stunted bodies and minds. It is estimated that 90 per cent of young child deaths in the "developing" world could be prevented by a supply of clean water, environmental sanitation, and the nutrition and health education of mothers. Meanwhile overconsumption in the "North" has resulted in a situation in which, for example, many of the countries which suffer from famine are actually major agricultural exporters to the "industrialised" countries.

These are hard facts to live with, but we are going to have to live with far worse unless attitudes change, for we are living today in a world in which no part can remain unaffected by what is happening elsewhere - somewhere the other shoe has to drop.

The need for development education

Development education is, essentially, the attempt to raise awareness in the "industrialized" world concerning the choices facing mankind, and the major responsibility of the privileged in setting things right.

While the gap between rich and poor exists everywhere, it is the attitudes of people in the "North" towards those in the "South" which are most urgently in need of change. Racial intolerance grows more and more menacing in hitherto "liberal" societies as southern immigrants seek the jobs which do not exist in their own societies due to under-development. One has only to look at the situation of immigrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Jamaica in Britain today to see a good example.

Nationalism is everywhere rampant, and the dreams of international understanding and peace will fade into oblivion unless we tackle the problem where it begins: with the education given to children, not only at school, but at home, by parents and by the television set, by the cinema, and by the books and toys which occupy their hours of play. By reaching young people early, before the wrong attitudes are formed, a global dimension can be brought into their lives which will help them to understand the causes and consequences of poverty and under-development.

But how can this be done? Is it seriously practicable to speak of reaching the child in the attempt to bring about attitudinal change? To do so, of course, we must reach the adults who have contact with the young: the teachers, the parents, the youth group leaders, the church dignitaries, workers' education movements, women's groups, the producers of TV and radio programmes for children, and the publishers of children's books and manufacturers of toys. But we cannot reach them through exhortation alone: we must show, in practical terms, how to go about helping the young to grow up into good world citizens, able fully to realise their own potential and to help others to do likewise.

The UNICEF programme

UNICEF's development education programme takes a number of forms. On the "in-school" side, teaching materials about the Third World, geared towards attitudinal change, are prepared as raw material for adaptation to local and national education systems, in such a way that they can be used within the time and other limitations of present curriculum demands rather than creating an additional burden in the classroom. National committees for UNICEF - themselves usually non-governmental organisations - are encouraged to collaborate with education authorities, teacher-training establishments, and NGOs active in the field, to hold seminars and establish working groups.

The UK national committee has its own Education sub-committee, works closely with the Centre for World Development Education, and recently opened its own Development Education Centre in Southampton. The French committee has sponsored an experiment in that country which led to a seminar last May under the joint auspices of the Ministries of Education and Co-operation, at which directors of teacher-training institutes and regional education centres discussed the internationalization of the social science curriculum at the late primary and early secondary levels throughout France. The proceedings were closely observed by representatives of national committees for UNICEF in Belgium, Luxemburg, Spain and Switzerland, themselves active in development education in their countries.

In Belgium, the president of the national committee for UNICEF is an Inspector of Education, seconded for two years at the Ministry's expense. He will participate in the visit of a group of European educators next spring to Jamaica, where they will stay with Jamaican teachers and share their lives at home, at school, and in the community. This is the second UNICEF experiment of this kind, the first having been to Sri Lanka in 1977, from which a considerable quantity of excellent teaching materials resulted.

School systems are, however, hard to reach and tend to resist change. Curriculum reform can be decreed from above, as in Sweden, but not necessarily implemented in any positive fashion by the unconvinced teacher. On the other hand, the dedicated teacher trying to bring Third World issues into the classroom will not get very far without official backing.

If children's attitudes are unlikely to change within the classroom if the teacher remains unconscientised - to use Paulo Freire's term - then how much more is this so with regard to the non-formal situation. The attitudes of adults with whom the young child has contact outside the school setting are of course crucial. Racist attitudes in children's books, and in TV and radio programmes, can be devastating.

Community participation

People are unlikely to understand situations in the developing world unless they can relate them to conditions at home. The gap between rich and poor is not only a North-South affair, nor is under-development the sole prerogative of the South. And understanding of the causes of poverty in one's own nation or neighborhood, working with disadvantaged people or minority

groups, can lead to greater understanding of the problems of developing countries and a realisation that these are in fact global problems requiring global solutions. Such solutions are unlikely to come about without practical action at the local and national level.

The need for community participation in development education is self-evident. This is where the great strength of non-governmental organisations lies. They work at the grass-roots level, their members are active community workers who can be mobilised to act as pressure groups, to exert influence on local and national government, on the media, and on schools through parent-teacher associations.

As consumers, they can boycott racist or paternalistic books and war toys, and campaign in support of issues such as "health for all" and infant feeding. They can ensure that their parliamentary representatives know how they feel about the foreign aid programme. They can participate in joint projects through which NGOs and UNICEF can help voluntary groups in the "developing" countries to establish their own projects, in a triangular partnership as was the case with the Kenya Water Project.

In that instance, international NGO women's groups helped their sister organizations in Kenya to undertake part of the UNICEF-assisted "water for health" programme, an outstandingly successful example of NGO/UNICEF collaboration which could be repeated elsewhere. In Sri Lanka, where ICVA's General Conference is to be held in November next year, the IYC national commission has been extended for a further two years and a number of NGOs are undertaking parts of the UNICEF-assisted basic services programme in that country.

Non-governmental organizations have expertise which is of immense value to organizations such as UNICEF which are trying to help developing countries achieve self-reliance, and this is equally true with regard to development education. Close co-operation at the international level - for example in training courses or in the production of joint materials - can be reflected at the national, regional and local levels which is where, in the last analysis, all real development education has to take place.

In addition to action through schools, churches, trade unions, libraries, local government and at the consumer level, NGOs could establish development education action groups and strategically-placed resource centres. Conferences leading to the establishment of national networks, bringing together those who are prepared to work together for international understanding and justice, can also result in workshops on specific issues and the production of special exhibits and other materials.

Influence on the media can be sought through special conferences with writers and publishers of textbooks and children's books and producers of children's programmes on TV and radio. Sponsorship of field trips for educators and development education seminars, collaboration with teacher-training and research institutes, adaptation and testing of internationally-produced materials, are all among the many aspects of a viable development education programme for NGOs. Those concerned with multi-cultural education in countries with large immigrant populations have a major stake in the success of such efforts.

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In all such activities, the national committee for UNICEF would be a natural partner, and all possible support would be given by the UNICEF offices in New York and Geneva and in those countries where we have programmes - at present 110. Assistance could also be sought from the UN's Non-Governmental Liaison Service, both in Geneva and New York, with which UNICEF works very closely, both on a day-to-day basis and through the Joint UN Information Committee's Working Group on Development Education.

This Group, of which UNICEF is at present the "lead agency", was established some six years ago to support implementation of the UNESCO Recommendation concerning education for international understanding and peace, and to plan joint action with regard to development education. It meets approximately twice a year, and a great deal of its remarkable volume of activity is due to the efforts of the NGLS.

Among the issues in the Working Group's plan of action at present are:

- Appropriate Technology
- Development Education for UN Staff
- Disabled Persons
- Energy
- Environment and Development
- Food and Nutrition
- Industrial Restructuring and Employment
- Infant Feeding
- International Youth Year
- Lifestyles and Natural Resources (PRG NGO Survey and Meeting)
- New International Economic Order
- New World Information Order (NWICO)
- Primary Health Care
- Science and Technology
- Water and Sanitation
- Women in Development

There are many other themes of relevance to development education, for example, Rights of the Child, and Disarmament. UNICEF has produced a dev/ed kit on peace education and is preparing others on recycling in the Sahel, water and sanitation, women and development, and a number of country kits.

In all of its materials UNICEF's main concern is in facilitating an <u>understanding</u> of the problem and encouraging in the user an ability to <u>identify</u> with others of different cultures, to accept one's own <u>responsibility</u> for change, and to recognize the essential <u>interdependence</u> of world society.

Development education is, of course, a long-term process; there are no quick or easy answers. And yet, most of the children in the classroom today will be voting by the end of this decade. Will they vote for economic and social justice and peace? For the right of every person born on this earth to have an equal chance to survive and to realise his or her full potential as a human being and world citizen?